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STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

MOBILIZATION'S IMPACT ON ARMY RESERVE FAMILY MEMBERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Soldiers of the Army Reserve have participated in every major contingency this nation has experienced, and they have done so with pride and distinction. More than 169,000 were called to duty in World War I and over 200,000 Army Reserve soldiers were mobilized during World War II. Conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and more recently, Desert Shield/Desert Storm (228,000 mobilized) and Operation Joint Endeavor (Bosnia), demonstrated that America's Army is increasingly dependent on the services of the Army Reserve to support its active force and fulfill its world-wide objectives. The primary focus of this paper is to identify the impact of mobilization on the family member, identify programs and initiatives that were implemented to diminish the impact of mobilization on the family member, and, finally, to draw conclusions about how well the Army Reserve programs and initiatives have addressed family member issues and concerns following mobilization.

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MOBILIZATION'S IMPACT ON ARMY RESERVE FAMILY MEMBERS

Soldiers of the Army Reserve have participated in every major contingency this nation has experienced, and they have done so with pride and distinction. More than 169,000 were called to duty in World War I and over 200,000 Army Reserve soldiers were mobilized during World War II. Conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and more recently, Desert Shield/Desert Storm (228,000 mobilized) and Operation Joint Endeavor (Bosnia), demonstrated that America's Army is increasingly dependent on the services of the Army Reserve to support its active force and fulfill its worldwide objectives.

Yet historically, little has been written about the family members (spouses/children/parents) of these Army Reserve soldiers. Certainly, family support and encouragement provided to these soldiers has been and continues to be vital to each soldier's readiness to fight and win; whether serving in peacetime or war, at home station, or in some distant land.

Understanding the important role of the family member, in conjunction with the key role the Army Reserve assumed in 1973 in the Total Force Policy, will lead to a better understanding of mobilization's impact on the family member. The primary focus of this paper is to identify the impact of mobilization on the family member, identify programs and initiatives that were implemented to diminish the impact of mobilization on the family member, and, finally, to draw conclusions about how well the Army

Reserve programs and initiatives have addressed family member issues and concerns following mobilization.

MOBILIZATION'S IMPACT ON THE ARMY RESERVE FAMILY MEMBER

More than 228,000 Reserve soldiers were mobilized for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. This large-scale call to active duty from the Army Reserve resulted in an unprecedented number of wartime separations among civilian family members from these Reserve soldiers. Because the Army Reserve is a ready and relevant piece of the Total Force, and the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) remains high, family members are at increased risk for separation.

Studies conducted with wartime active duty soldiers specifically identified several negative consequences of family separation. Chief among these were higher divorce rates⁵ and marital maladjustment.⁶ While the Department of Defense (DOD) conducted several detailed studies on the Reserve Soldier's perspective of the impact of mobilization following participation in the Persian Gulf War,⁷ none of those earlier studies examined the experiences of family members.

Findings from a 1998 study on Reserve spouses from units in the northwestern United States, who experienced the mobilization of their Reserve member spouse during the Persian Gulf War, found that the stress of "uncertainty" was a primary factor associated with separation. Uncertainty was conceptualized in the above study as the spouse's inability to predict future events, fear of potential outcomes, and lack of confidence or resources in being

able to manage newly assumed responsibilities. The study further suggested that the sense of uncertainty resulted from both external and internal factors. The external factors which contributed to spousal uncertainty related to the new situation they had been placed in, which they found indeterminate and/or threatening. Internal factors which contributed to spousal uncertainty came from challenges to their personal convictions, values, and self-worth. While the level of uncertainty varied from one spouse to another, all spouses expressed concern about the unpredictability of the length of separation, especially if the soldier was deployed to a hostile area.

The Messecar/Kendall (1998) study indicated that:

Uncertainty was exacerbated in situations where it was unclear how the family would manage without the aid and support of the absent spouse. Probably the most difficult condition to cope with was the potential threat to future financial security. Hill (1949) defined loss of income of 20 percent or greater as a financial crisis for a family. Many spouses suffered this amount of income loss or greater. 12

Mobilization of the soldier for many families was unexpected, and as a consequence family members had insufficient time to adequately prepare for the new situation they were placed in. In some cases, the soldier had only been in the Army Reserve a short time (as little as two months), and the family members were totally unfamiliar with any aspects of military life and the military services and benefits available to them. In other cases, family members had to assume new and unfamiliar roles such as taking care of finances, operating the family business,

providing child care, and performing routine maintenance around the home. 13

The June 1998 Army Research Institute Special Report examined attitudes and opinions of soldiers who had deployed in contingency operations in Somalia (Operation Restore/Continue Hope) and Bosnia (Operation Joint Endeavor). Data indicated that the amount of family support following mobilization affects soldier morale. This study concluded that the amount of family support is a direct function of:

- 1. The family's understanding of the mission.
- 2. Perceived level of danger to the soldier.
- 3. Perception of Army support for families during the deployment (e.g., financial services, housing assistance, transportation).
- 4. Amount and accuracy of information they receive about the mission and their soldiers.
- Ease and availability of communication with their soldier.

The above study suggests that, if communication is high between the Army organization, or its support organizations, and the family members, the family members then feel better informed about their soldier's situation which, in turn, reduces family member stress. 14

A comprehensive study conducted by the United States Army
Reserve Command's (USARC) Family Program Office during the period
October 1997 through February 1998 queried over 300 soldiers
returning from Operation Joint Endeavor. Some of the key issues

studied, which impacted directly on family members during periods of mobilization, are identified below.

- · Responsiveness of unit to family needs.
- · Briefings on medical benefits for families.
- · Family Support Group personal contact with family.
- TRICARE/Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) programs.
- · Family support in hometown.
- Information and referral for family members.
- Information on deployment/separation issues.
- Family Support Group newsletters to families.
- Family support at military installations.
- · Installation medical support.
- · Pre-deployment briefing on family services.
- · Names, numbers, and locations of family services.
- Soldier responsibility for preparing family for mobilization.
- · Emergency financial aid.
- · Review of Family Care Plans.

A detailed analysis of the above criteria was performed to assess which of these key issues had greater perceived value over the others. The results of the data analysis provided the following ranking of the top eight issues, by priority:

- · Briefings on medical benefits.
- Information on deployment/separation issues.
- TRICARE/CHAMPUS programs.
- · Responsiveness of unit to family needs.

- · Information and referral for family members.
- · Family Support Group personal contact with family.
- · Family support in hometown.
- Family Support Group newsletters to families.

*Note: There were some differences in the above ranking based on a soldier's mobilization with home unit or mobilization with other than home unit. For example, when mobilied with other than home unit, family members were less likely to have personal contact from the soldier's unit or the unit's Family Support Group. Overall, soldiers mobilized with other than home unit, reported that the unit was less resonsive to family member needs.

Based on the importance of understanding what criteria was of greatest priority, the United States Army Reserve Command (USARC) study then assessed how well Reserve units and family support personnel were addressing each issue. The underlying assumption was that the impact of deployment (mobilization) would be diminished on the family member to the degree units and family support personnel effectively addressed each concern. Of the eight issues identified above, it was determined that units and family support personnel were "not hitting the mark" in the following critical areas:

- Responsiveness of unit to family needs.
- TRICARE/CHAMPUS programs.
- · Pre-deployment briefing on family services.
- Information on deployment/separation issues.
- · Family support in hometown.
- Family Support Group personal contact with family.

• Briefing on medical benefits for family members. 15

A Customer Satisfaction Survey¹⁶ conducted by the 94th United States Army Reserve Regional Support Command in 1997 directly supports the conclusions of the USARC Family Program Office study. More than 1,500 soldiers and family members were asked to identify critical services needed during a 12-month period, list perceived problem areas, and to identify areas for improvement. Within the context of critical services needed, financial aid, health care, and family readiness were each identified. One of the most significant areas directly impacting family members upon a soldier's mobilization is "unit support of families." Unit support of families was identified as one of the most significant problem areas of concern from both soldiers and family members. Finally, survey respondents indicated that one of the important areas in need of improvement was communication. 17 Effective communication that is timely and responsive to family members' needs leaves the family member better informed, which greatly diminishes mobilization's negative impact.

From the above studies and the increased OPTEMPO of America's Army, it is easy to conclude that family members of Army Reserve soldiers are at increased risk for experiencing the impacts of mobilization. The critical factors which directly influence the negative impacts of mobilization are the feelings of uncertainty associated with separation from spouse or loved one, the lack of resources readily available to address identified needs, and the overwhelming feelings of frustration

and inadequacy family members assume with increased responsibilities as a result of the new situation surrounding them. As indicated, family member feelings of uncertainty are exacerbated by the unpredictability of the length of mobilization (Desert Shield/Desert Storm) and the family members' perception that their soldier is deploying to a hostile area.

Mobilization directly impacts the family member's financial situation. If the level of income due to mobilization is significantly diminished (20 percent or more), the family member's financial stability becomes seriously threatened. It can also be concluded that family members who are unfamiliar with the Army way of life, its benefits and entitlements, and the methods to access them, experience high levels of frustration that adds additional stress to an already strained situation. It is critical, therefore, that family members of Army Reserve soldiers receive the critical support necessary to mitigate the impact of mobilization and diminish the negative consequences of soldier deployments in the future.

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES IMPLEMENTED TO DIMINISH MOBILIZATION'S IMPACT ON THE ARMY RESERVE FAMILY MEMBER

In 1985 Forces Command (FORSCOM) authorized a test (pilot)
Family Program to be established at three United States Army
Reserve Commands (ARCOMs). The selected ARCOMs, the 90th, 96th,
and 120th, were each authorized a three-person cell to initiate
and develop a viable Family Program. Each cell consisted of a
social work officer (Active Guard Reservist (AGR) in the grade of

04/05), a Civilian Social Worker (GS-11-dual status), and an Administrative Assistant (GS-07). If successful, Family Programs would be established throughout the Army Reserve. Soldier and family readiness (for mobilization) was the broad focus under which these pilot programs were initiated. While it is not the intent of this paper to discuss the relative success of these pilot programs, it is important to acknowledge them as the starting point of the Army Reserve's effort to address the readily apparent state of readiness, or lack thereof, of Army Reserve soldiers and, even more so, family members.

From the pilot program beginnings in 1985, Family Program efforts have expanded throughout the Army Reserve. For the most part, Reserve family members were distanced, both geographically and educationally, from the roles and missions of the Army Reserve. During the early to mid-1980s (peacetime), few of the benefits and entitlements, now authorized for Reservists, were extended to family members. For the most part, benefits and entitlements authorized for family members became available only if the soldier was placed on active duty for a period of 30 days or more. The Army Reserve had not experienced a major mobilization for that length of time in more than three decades. From the perspective of most family members, the Army Reserve was just another source of secondary income for the Reservist, and mobilization was not an anticipated potentiality in their lives.

Aware of this diminished state of family member readiness towards mobilization, the established mission of the Family Program was to assist soldiers and family members in ways that

would alleviate the challenges and difficulties of mobilization. 18 To accomplish the above mission, it was apparent that concerted efforts would be focused towards educating family members about the Army Reserve, the inevitable potential for soldiers to be mobilized, and how mobilization would likely impact family members. For example, pre-Desert Storm mobilization procedures found that many families were ill-prepared to have their soldier leave. Family Care Plans, Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System (DEERS) enrollment, identification (ID) cards, SUREPAY enrollment, wills, power of attorney, and a general lack of knowledge and understanding were all identified as areas of concern. 19

In an effort to begin the process of addressing the above concerns and educating family members, Staff Assistance Visits from Family Program personnel were scheduled for each Army Reserve unit. These visits were usually in concert with the unit's annual Family Day and included educational briefings to family members. (One drill day out of the annual training schedule is programmed for family participation at the unit to improve family awareness and enhance soldier morale.) Soldiers and their family members were strongly encouraged to attend these meetings, with the aim of getting all concerned parties to think about and begin preparatory actions that would improve their state of readiness.

<u>Unit commander's duties</u> were clearly delineated, and the expectation established for their active support in Family Program initiatives. Commanders would be responsible for the

creation of a viable Family Support Group at the unit level.

Commanders were responsible for identifying all soldiers requiring Family Care Plans and initiate the counseling and paperwork requirement as specified in Army Regulation 600-20.

Commanders were also responsible for the selection of the unit's military representative and a unit family member volunteer who would work in concert to address all family readiness issues and concerns. Commanders were authorized up to eight training hours annually to help meet this requirement.

The <u>Unit Family Army Representative</u> (UFAR), or soldier selected by the commander, was assigned Family Program responsibilities as an additional duty. The Unit Family Army Representative's duties included representing the commander at Family Support Group meetings, providing administrative assistance to soldiers and family members in completing Family Care Plans, and developing the Family Support Group strategy to promote DEERS enrollment and issuance of ID cards, Family Day activities, in-service training, and on-going orientation programs to educate new personnel and their family members.

The initiative to identify a strong and motivated <u>Unit</u>

Family Volunteer Coordinator (UFV) was critical to the success of the unit's Family Support Group. This individual would become the link between family member needs and concerns and the commander. The Unit Family Volunteer Coordinator's responsibilities would include creating and maintaining effective unit family member telephone ties to ensure all family members were in the information loop.

Unit family members who had been with the unit for longer periods of time would be matched with newcomers with a <u>Family Sponsorship Program</u>. The goal of the sponsorship program was to make the new family member feel welcome and to establish a bond with other unit family members who were knowledgeable and responsible to new member concerns. Additionally, the Unit Family Volunteer Coordinator would be responsible for creating a viable list of community and local military installation programs and services that can provide help in solving problems during times of mobilization.

Family Support Groups are an officially sanctioned organization within the Army Reserve (AR 608-1). The purpose of the Family Support Group is to be the organization family members look to for information and support, not just following mobilization, but more importantly prior to mobilization.

Volunteer members of the Family Support Group coordinate the unit's Sponsorship Program, telephone tree, and provide an informational and support network. Family Support Groups are the critical link between commanders and family members. Through concerted outreach efforts, family members with little or no knowledge of military benefits and entitlements are informed and assisted. It is through Family Support Group efforts that many family members have the opportunity to be trained and therefore be ready for the eventuality of mobilization.

It is also through unit outreach efforts that family members feel less alone and uncertain about their soldier's absence.

Volunteer efforts provide critical conduits for educating family

members and supporting their need for assistance throughout the period of mobilization.

Emphasis by unit administrators toward <u>SUREPAY</u> has helped in many ways to alleviate some of the financial concerns family members suffered. SUREPAY, at a minimum, guaranteed that a portion of the soldier's pay was deposited directly into an account (joint if married) that family members had access to. In this way, financial obligations could be managed more efficiently by the family member. SUREPAY also allowed the soldier to establish allotments to major creditors (mortgage, insurances, auto loans), thereby relieving family members of those worries and concerns.

In an attempt to ensure family member access to health and medical benefits, new efforts were focused on family member enrollmentin the Defense Eligibility Enrollement Reporting System. This was accomplished largely through the issuance of updated ID cards to soldiers and new dependent ID cards to all eligible family members. While family members were not eligible to access health and medical benefits unless their soldier was mobilized for more than 30 days, DEERS enrollment created a "Reserve database" by which they could be identified if and when mobilization occurred.

In conjunction with the above effort, family members were provided detailed information packets about TRICARE/CHAMPUS.

Unfortunately, TRICARE/CHAMPUS programs are complicated and frustrating to understand. Even active duty family members who are familiar with the TRICARE/CHAMPUS programs find them

complicated. Such was the case with Reserve family members as they tried to become quickly familiar with the health and medical benefits entitled them. Family Support Groups and Family Program Coordinators worked with TRICARE/CHAMPUS professionals to provide detailed briefings to unit family members. The outcome of these briefings was a more informed family member who had some familiarity with the military's health and medical program, but more essentially, had valuable points of contact identified for future assistance.

Clearly the Army Reserve's need to address the state of readiness of its family members was the intent of instituting the Family Programs and the other initiatives discussed above. Also clear to Army Reserve leadership was the underlying assumption that, to the degree these readiness issues were effectively and efficiently addressed, mobilization's impact on the family member would be diminished.

EFFECTIVENESS OF ARMY RESERVE PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES IN DIMINISHING THE IMPACT OF MOBILIZATION ON THE FAMILY MEMBER

The degree of uncertainty experienced by family members as a result of separation due to mobilization differs considerably among family members, according to the Messecar and Kendall study (1998). The primary cause of family member feelings of uncertainty resulted from the unpredictable situation they found themselves in. Respondents in the above study participated in Desert Shield/Desert Storm under Presidential call-up, and there was no defined period of time specified for the mobilization.

Subsequent mobilizations involving Army Reserve soldiers, under Presidential call-up (i.e., Operation Joint Endeavor), have been for a period of 270 days. Studies of soldiers and family members subsequent to Desert Shield/Desert Storm did not ascribe or link family member uncertainty with the unpredictability of an unspecified mobilization period of time.²⁴

However, uncertainty under both scenarios (unspecified time vs. specified 270 days) was still identified as an area of concern if the soldier was deployed to a hostile area. While little can be done by the military in avoiding the possibility of sending Reserve soldiers into hostile areas, family members in all studies indicated that understanding the unit's mission and having the ability to communicate with the soldier during mobilization reduced their feelings of uncertainty.

Family member Sponsorship Programs have done much to alleviate the unfamiliarity new unit family members experienced in the past. Obviously, sponsorship programs are only effective when assigned sponsors take an active and responsive role in befriending and orienting the new family member to the military way of life. The secondary benefit of sponsorship programs is the integration of the new family member into the unit's family and social network. Where done effectively, the family member feels less isolated when/if their soldier is mobilized and may themselves become a valued asset as a Family Program volunteer.

Finances are often a concern whether in peacetime or during periods of mobilization. The soldier's military pay seldom matches dollar for dollar income generated from civilian

employment. Once mobilized, professional people (physicians, attorneys, engineers) and highly-paid technicians often experience diminished income levels. The overall impact of an income level that suddenly fails to meet monthly obligations or maintain an accustomed standard of living is traumatic to the family members.

SUREPAY, even when the level of income has been significantly reduced, guarantees that the income which is available from military pay is accessible to the family member. While little can be done to adjust military pay in line with a mobilized soldier's civilian income, financial counseling and budgeting advice are made available via unit or active installation support offices. Army Emergency Relief program information and points of contact are made available through the unit commander or the Family Support Group. Family members are educated about their rights under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act that protects them from creditors.

Good communication between the unit is essential in reducing the impact of mobilization. The importance of communication between the family member and their soldier has already been established as a primary source of support to the family member. The unit, under conditions of mobilization, is perhaps the second most important source, and Family Support Groups the next. Routine newsletters from the unit and frequent inquiries via the unit telephone tree keep the family member informed and attached to the unit. There should be no question that a family member raises about the military and its benefits and entitlements that

cannot be answered by unit personnel or the Family Support Group.

The Family Programs established throughout the Army Reserve have

done much to address communication issues among family members.

One general concern that family members expressed hardship over was the sudden increase in household responsibilities. With the soldier mobilized, household responsibilities fell upon other family members or solely upon the spouse, who expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. This is not an easy problem to address when many, if not all, of the unit's family members are in similar situations. However, aggressive Family Support Groups in some units have identified community resources and personnel to call upon for assistance. Often it is just having an identified resource available and placing the necessary call that sets things in motion to address the family member need and eliminate the sense of helplessness.

Health and medical benefits and entitlements under the current TRICARE/CHAMPUS programs are being aggressively addressed by unit commanders, Family Program Coordinators, and Family Support Group personnel. This may be the least understood, yet most frustrating, aspect of military life for the Army Reserve family member. While much is being done to provide information packets to family members and educate them about their entitlements, much remains to be done. Perhaps the most significant accomplishment commanders and Family Support Groups provide is the TRICARE/CHAMPUS program point of contact phone number and location where family members can obtain the assistance required for their specific situation.

Family members expressed the importance of being provided as much information as is available about their soldier's deployment, and what the impact of mobilization will be on them (the family member). The pre-mobilization briefing conducted by the unit, with follow-on briefings and contacts from the Family Support Group, specifically address family member needs in these areas. As stated above, family members, who had familiarity with the military way of life and understood what benefits and entitlements were available to them, experienced significantly less impacts when their soldier was mobilized.

In an ideal world, all family members of the Army Reserve would be fully integrated into the military way of life. They would be familiar with the unit their soldier is assigned to and actively pursue information that would educate and inform them of all their military benefits and entitlements. Unfortunately, there exists a high rate (30 percent) of transition within the Army Reserve which translates to family member turnover.

The challenge facing the leadership of the Army Reserve in the future, taking into consideration the increased role and significance of the Reserves, is to maintain and improve the level of support for the family member. Within the ranks of the active military, and more importantly the Army Reserve, as demonstrated in the above studies, 26 soldier morale and continued military service are directly tied to the amount of support and encouragement provided to the soldier by the family member. This challenge is exacerbated by the high attrition levels and perceived levels of benefit for membership in the Army Reserve.

To meet this challenge, commanders at all levels must recognize the important role and contribution of the family member to the viability of today's military. Family members must be recognized and supported by continued emphasis on existing Family Programs and initiatives that enhance their familiarity with the military. Commanders must be insightful as to future needs and incentives that will entice family members to encourage their soldier to say active in the Army Reserve. Truly, if "soldiers are our credentials," then family members are the gold bullion that makes them a viable and ready resource.

WORD COUNT = 4260

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